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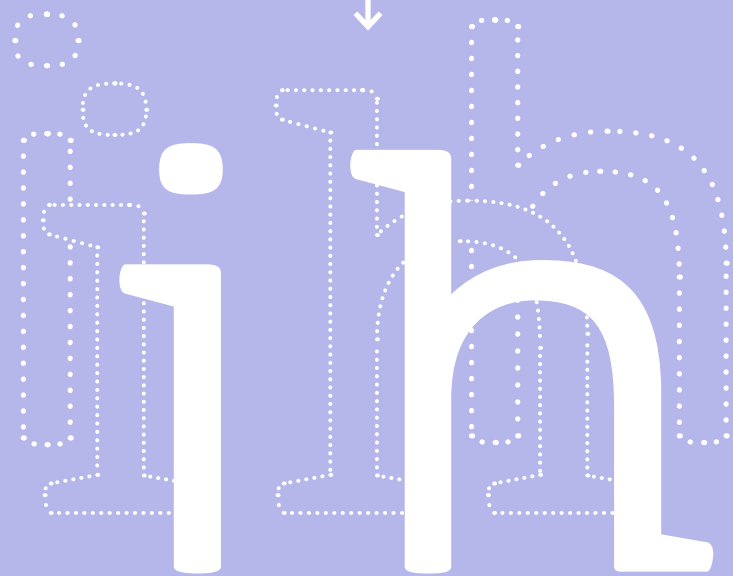
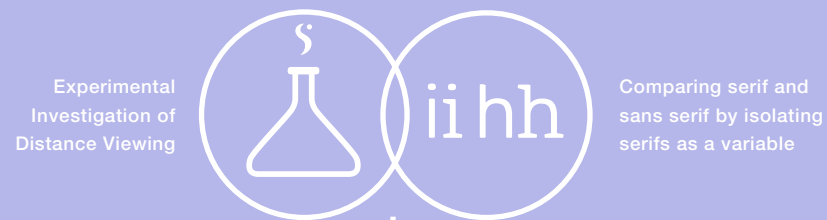
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## RESULT

Letters with serifs on the vertical extremes are more legible than the same sans serif letters, while lower case serif letters "i" and "h" are easily confused with serif letters "l" and "b".

BEIER, DYSON  
The Influence of Serifs on "h" and "i": Useful  
Knowledge from Design-led Scientific Research p. 69

ISSN 0022-2224

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VISIBLE LANGUAGE

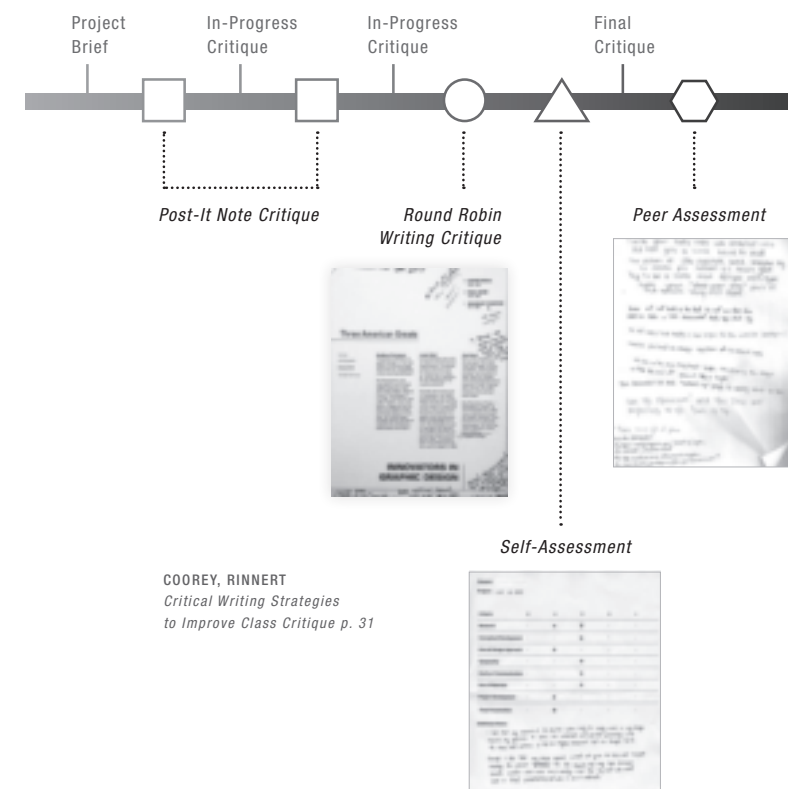
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# VISIBLE LANGUAGE



THE JOURNAL OF VISUAL  
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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Before there was reading there was seeing. Visible Language has been concerned with ideas that help define the unique role and properties of visual communication. A basic premise of the journal has been that created visual form is an autonomous system of expression which must be defined and explored on its own terms. Today more than ever people navigate the world and probe life's meaning through visual language. This journal is devoted to enhancing people's experience through the advancement of research and practice of visual communication.

If you are involved in creating or understanding visual communication in any field, we invite your participation in Visible Language. While our scope is broad, our disciplinary application is primarily design. Because sensory experience is foundational in design, research in design is often research in the experience of visual form: how it is made, why it is beautiful, how it functions to help people form meaning. Research from many disciplines sheds light on this experience: neuroscience, cognition, perception, psychology, education, communication, informatics, computer science, library science, linguistics. We welcome articles from these disciplines and more.

Published continuously since 1967, Visible Language maintains its policy of having no formal editorial affiliation with any professional organization — this requires the continuing, active cooperation of key investigators and practitioners in all of the disciplines that impinge on the journal's mission as stated above.

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Send address changes to:

Sheri Cottingim  
Office of Business Affairs  
College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning  
University of Cincinnati  
PO Box 210016  
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0016  
sheri.cottingim@uc.edu

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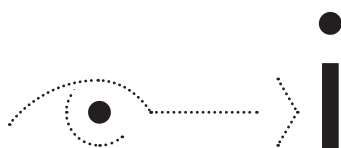
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

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### BLUNT CONFERENCE

AIGA Design Educators Conference *Blunt: Explicit and Graphic Design Criticism Now*, was held April 12-14 at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. (<http://bluntconference.aiga.org>)

The *Blunt* sessions were:

- 1 Practice and Theory: Critiquing Design Activity  
Design Activity as Critique
- 2 History: Evaluations of Our Past
- 3 Writing: Language as a Tool
- 4 Education: Looking to Our Future

Three papers from the *Blunt* conference are included in this issue of *Visible Language*:

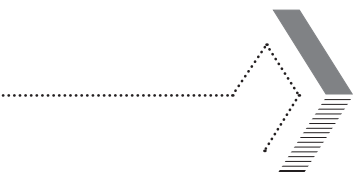
- 1 "Moving Beyond 'Just Making Things': Design History in the Studio and Survey Classroom."
- 2 "Critical Writing Strategies to Improve Class Critiques"
- 3 "Letterpress: Looking Backward to Look Forward"

These papers, selected by the conference organizing committee and the journal's double-blind peer-review process, represent the sessions on History — Alexander Cooper's, Rose Gridneff's, and Andrew Haslam's article on the use of letterpress technology in teaching; Writing — Jillian Coorey's and Gretchen Caldwell Rinnert's article on how writing can play a beneficial role in studio course design critiques; and Education — Dori Griffin's article on how design history might be better integrated and more influential in design education.

Many thanks to the conference organizers and the conference presenters for this glimpse into the multifaceted aspects of design criticism!







## 03 Letterpress: Looking Backward to Look Forward

ALEXANDER COOPER, ROSE GRIDNEFF,  
ANDREW HASLAM

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the value of retaining letterpress workshops within art and design schools, not merely as a tool to understand our past, but as a means to critically reflect upon our future.

The benefits of teaching letterpress to graphic design students as a way of improving their understanding of typography are well documented. There is an argument for preserving 'craft' subjects including letterpress within the curriculum, as they foster immersive learning. The letterpress process is a significant teaching tool that complements, and can act in conjunction with, computer-based design education. This paper seeks to build upon these debates, examining the intersection between the practice and theory of an otherwise technologically outdated process. The paper focuses upon 6x6: Collaborative Letterpress Project as a case study. The project brings together six leading UK Higher Education Institutions with active letterpress workshops. It encourages the sharing of best practice within a specialist subject area, through the creation of a collaborative publication where students and staff are linking their practice with critical and reflective writing in relation to the medium. Traditionally, workshop areas have been concerned with the acquisition of a skill, often taught through rote learning or technical demonstration. By positioning students at the centre of the process they have been encouraged to form their own perspective on the discipline. Through the examination of evolving letterpress paradigms, it is possible to question why we do something; as opposed to how it is done.

## THE CONTEXT

> Until the latter half of the twentieth century, the majority of art and design colleges and some trade schools in the UK housed letterpress workshops to support the teaching of composition and typography, and as a means of preparing apprentices for the printing industry. This paper explores the value of retaining these workshops, not merely as a tool to understand our past but as a means of critically reflecting upon our future. Letterpress within these institutions was traditionally taught through a 'training' model as preparation for the print trade. This training characteristically prioritized the acquisition of skills to enable the production of printed artifacts such as: books, newspapers, periodicals, ephemera and packaging. 'Expert' technical demonstrators, themselves 'trained' in composition and print production, were responsible for imparting their knowledge of the reproduction process to students. Through this didactic educational model of 'instruction', apprentice compositors and printers were trained to a consistent standard regulated by Master Printers and the related compositors, printers, bookbinders and finishers guilds. Each college's workshop and equipment mirrored that found within industrial print shops.

Research into the positioning of the letterpress process within education is pertinent today, as there has been a marked shift in purpose from technical teaching, to a tool for investigation and experimentation. The industry the workshops were devised to serve, by producing a consistently trained workforce able to efficiently compose type and safely operate presses, has been catastrophically reduced. Commercial letterpress workshops continue to operate as small private presses on the basis of a model more closely related to craft rather than industrial production. Today nearly all of the 'apprentice trained compositors' working as technical or academic staff who once were responsible for the letterpress workshops have retired.

: *We have therefore entered a period within education  
: where letterpress practice continues but is not in the  
: hands of anyone who has 'learnt their trade' through  
: the apprenticeship tradition.*

A younger generation of technical staff has appropriated college workshop spaces to reinvigorate letterpress values informed by their own educational experience of design. Institutions which have chosen to retain print workshops have done so to support the education of students from graphic design and illustration courses. This shift of purpose from 'training' to 'education' has taken time

to work its way through the system. The consistent body of letterpress subject knowledge, which was formerly instilled in the technical staff through training, could not be relied upon. The participants understanding and skills varied greatly but there was a collective enthusiasm for collaborative work. The fundamental shift in a generation of teaching staffs experience and by inference their perception of the value of letterpress, coupled with the staff and student's knowledge of digital type has radically altered student's experience of the workshop spaces and their relationship to typographic design.

The roots of letterpresses repurposing stretch back to the 1960's, a decade in which the UK Art Schools shifted political cultural and academic culture. In 1959 decisions were made to develop a Diploma in Art and Design nationally as recommended by the Coldstream Report (HMSO, 1960). A National Diploma in Design (NDD) was introduced in the 1960's. Sixteen colleges were selected to teach the new award in Graphic Design. A number of the participating colleges, Brighton, CSM, Camberwell, LCC (formerly LCP) and Glasgow School of Art began to teach students working for the new award. During this period Graphic Design students were being taught in the same institutions as compositors and printing apprentices but on completely separate courses. In 1983, the invention of the Macintosh computer prompted a decade of turmoil within the print industry when the leaden army of type was largely replaced by digital composition throughout the western world. Despite attempts by the powerful print unions, guilds and confederations of printers, the industry had irreversibly changed. The division of the print trade which identified clear specialist areas of production for the industrial scale production of language — compositor, proof reader, sub editor, stone man, make ready, printer etc — was largely usurped by digital composition in which the writer effectively composed digital text and the designers/typesetter styled the page and lithography rather than letterpress became the means of production.

The radical change in type composition from letterpress to digital and the move away from relief printing to lithographic production prompted many art colleges in the UK to dispose of their letterpress equipment, believing it to be redundant. Fortunately, the value of retaining workshop areas within design schools has been identified on a national level by The Council for Higher Education in Art & Design (CHEAD) which has undertaken research into 'minority specialist subjects', which encompass, "subjects that are concerned with the teaching and learning of core skills, materials and processes; specifically this covers subjects that are concerned with non-digital issues, and with the physicality of processes/materials" (CHEAD, 2008). These have been identified through case studies and research that include workshop areas such as: ceramics, metalwork, textiles, bookbinding and letterpress. Ian Farren, Educator,

argues the economic value of these subjects, which have traditionally formed a part of the core learning of art and design education that has given the UK its creative 'edge' (2008). Furthermore, the benefits of teaching graphic design students letterpress to gain a deeper understanding of typography, are well documented. Professor Herbert Spencer, typographer and teacher (and former Head of Graphic Design at the Royal College of Art) argued for retaining 'craft' subjects as the physicality of processes including letterpress foster immersive learning (1982). Susanna Edwards, design educator, argues that the letterpress process is a significant teaching tool that complements, and should act in conjunction with, computer-based design education (2005). There are now opportunities for new approaches to the letterpress process that combine the analogue and the digital. The advances in digital technology have enabled designers to prepare technically refined images and letterforms which can be easily reproduced through relief printing. Today, the primacy of the printed page is not always the final outcome and letterpress has become an integrated production tool serving a wider range of outputs including: film, animation, lithography and screen-printing. The work produced as a response to the 6x6 project serves as evidence some of which makes use of laser cut relief blocks authored in digital files.

Cooper & Gridneff (2010) have previously stated that processes such as letterpress should be explored beyond the value of a teaching tool, stating that letterpress is valuable because of the transferable skills it can equip students with, such as an appreciation of physical space and the slower speed of work fostering reflection through design. Steve Rigley, Head of Graphic Design at Glasgow School of Art and project participant, discusses the importance of decision making that is inherent within the letterpress process, ...

: *"The problem is that default settings on the Mac stop*  
: *students from really looking and making genuine design*  
: *decisions. The actual restrictions of letterpress can be*  
: *really liberating."* (2005).

## THE 6 X 6: COLLABORATIVE LETTERPRESS PROJECT

6x6: Collaborative Letterpress Project brings together six UK-based Higher Education Institutions with letterpress workshops to explore an alternative model of learning; learning through shared and immersive experience. The University of Brighton, Camberwell College of Arts, London College of Communication, Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, Lincoln School of Art & Design and Glasgow School of Art each have letterpress workshops with a dedicated member of technical staff. All are engaged with practice-led research,

but until now, there has been no mechanism for collectively reviewing and sharing findings. The project follows a participatory action research model (Krimmerman, 2001), with students involved at all stages and playing an integral and equal part in the design and execution of the research.

: *The project was designed to make links between existing  
: educational workshops and to serve as a mechanism for  
: exploring how the process is being used.*

## THE PROJECT AIMS & OBJECTIVES

At the beginning of the project and through consultation with the collaborating colleges, we identified and refined a set of aims:

- 1 To link colleges with letterpress workshops and celebrate shared immersive research and practice through common projects.
- 2 To strengthen and enlarge existing letterpress networks and to support the development of research and practice enriching the pedagogic experience for students and staff.
- 3 To promote critical debate within the discipline of typography, letterpress practice and teaching and in so doing, inform the broader discipline of graphic design.
- 4 To document and record the range of equipment, typefaces and practices within the workshops.
- 5 To encourage and stimulate research into the historical development of student's typographic education through letterpress within different Art and Design Schools.
- 6 To encourage and promote the dissemination of knowledge acquired through research and practice.

These broad aims were distilled into the following objectives:

- 1 Select a group of colleges with Letterpress workshops
- 2 Invite the collaborating colleges to select three students and three members of staff technical and academic to work on a common brief.
- 3 Write an open brief as a starting point which would encourage a diverse range of approaches to the research and practice. Invite collaborators to submit a reflective essay on the issues raised within their research and its relation to practice.
- 4 Set production parameters for the brief in terms of paper stock, format, size, imposition, extent and binding. Establish a series

of stage deadlines for: briefing visits to all colleges, sponsorship of paper stock/cutting and delivery, joint meeting of collaborating staff teams to strengthen networks, discuss and refresh collective aims and agree time scales and responsibilities.

- 5 To develop a research methodology which enabled students and staff within individual college workshops to research alongside one another in an immersive and collaborative environment.
- 6 Collect, edit, collate design, and promote publication, and disseminate collaborative research through a publication, exhibition and conference.

## **THE DESIGN BRIEF**

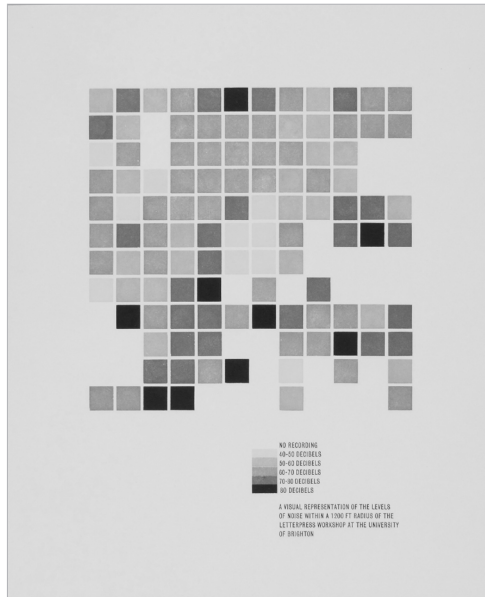
The six participating colleges responded to a set brief, each contributing six pieces, student and staff work. Participants were asked to respond to the immediate 1200ft radius of their letterpress workshop. Collectively, these prints provide a positioning of not just the geographic location of the workshop, but also the positioning of students and staff in relation to their approach to the letterpress process. Each college has designed and printed work in an edition of 200 to form the book, that when published alongside the essays and type inventories, provides an overview of contemporary letterpress practice within design education.

The project combines a traditional understanding of letterpress composition with a contemporary approach to design education. Work has been exhibited at her House Gallery, London (November 2012), University of Brighton Gallery (December 2012) and Winchester School of Art Gallery (March 2013). Papers exploring the findings have been presented at St Bride Library Letterpress Conference, London (November 2012), The New Art of Making Books, Winchester School of Art (March 2013) and AIGA Design Educators Conference, Virginia USA (April 2013).

## **THE APPROACH**

The work produced demonstrates a diverse range of approaches to contemporary letterpress practice, informed by a broad range of methods for generating content. Some prints have been developed according to the geographic positioning of the workshop, examining the physical location where the work is being created; be it the city, the college, or the workshop itself. Other pieces of work utilize content, exploring the discipline of typography and the nature of letterpress practice. These are executed through various means, from expressive prints that celebrate the process through overprinting, to analytical pieces of documentation and information design. Projects from several of the colleges make use of archival material within the

workshop; found formes and image plates. Although there are common thematic threads within the work, i.e. history, geography, language and found formes, these have been approached in personal and idiosyncratic ways.



**FIGURE 1** Barnaby Stepney, BA (Hons) Graphic Design Student, University of Brighton. A visual representation of the levels of noise within a 1200ft radius of the letterpress workshop at the University of Brighton. Border patterns, intended for decoration, have been appropriated within a five-colour registration to convey information. The 36pt grid structure, an integral element of both typography and mapping, makes use of analytical thinking resting heavily upon the principles of information design. Stepney has made a direct connection between volume and tone, and grid position and geographic location.

... *The context of each individual college influences the nature of the work produced, whereas previously the overarching desire was to strive for standardization.*

For example, the London College of Communication's (formerly London College of Printing) history as a trade school is made visible through the disciplined ethos of the pieces produced within the workshop — emphasis has been placed upon typography and information. In contrast, Lincoln's work stems from an expressive tradition.

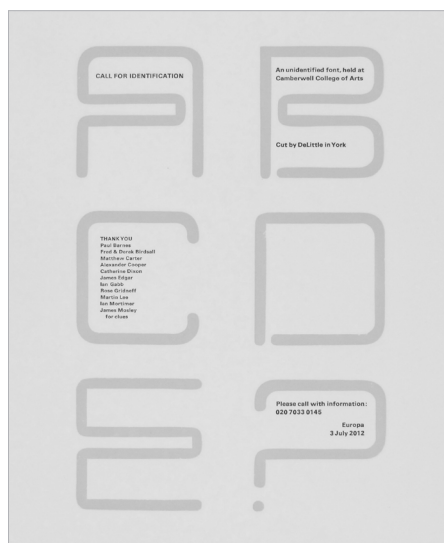
The project has clearly outlined each institution's different approach to the process. Each set of six prints are clearly defined by the constraints of the workshop. The selection of typefaces available and



the extent of the cases in each collectively form what would once have been referred to as the 'style of the house'. There is an element of permanence about metal type. Colleges have committed to its physical presence within the workshops, it occupies floor space, it comes with a cost, and by inference, it has importance. In contrast, digital type, occupies no space and is by nature ephemeral. James Edgar, Senior Letterpress Technician at Camberwell College of Arts, argues;

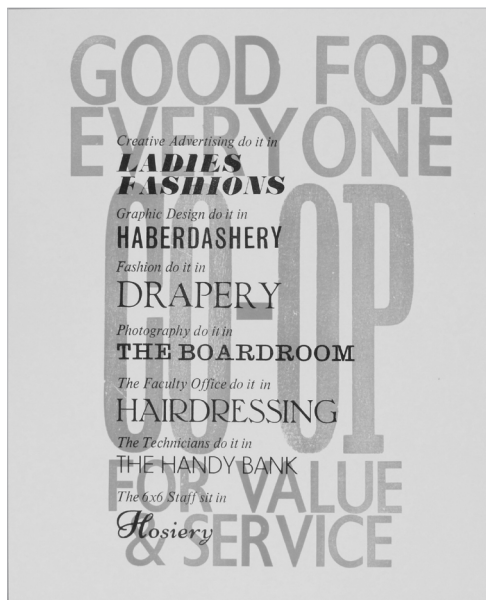
“There is a visible language that exists from choices made in the past, students and practitioners using the workshop can expose a renewed interest in the typefaces that have been selected from history. The letterpress workshop at Camberwell is unique in that it is situated in the space where it originated in 1905. The typographic choices available in the present have been very much informed by the past.” (2012).

Sebastian Brown, a student from Brighton commented, “a limited range of fonts and weights makes you explore those restrictions within the design. We used old fonts in a current way”.



**FIGURE 2** Mia Frostner and Rob Sollis, Lecturers, BA (Hons) Graphic Design, Camberwell College of Arts. The workshop at Camberwell houses several unique typefaces, including Flaxman which was designed by Edward Wright. It also contains this unknown wood font in one size only, cut by DeLittle in York but does not appear to be included in their type catalogues. The piece therefore highlights that letterpress workshops may contain historical letterforms which are unavailable in the digital arena. The piece documents the start of a process of enquiry recording those who have been consulted. It therefore visualizes ongoing historical research and serves as a call for more information.

For Lincoln School of Art, this historical understanding is informed by the staff's own experiences as students, noting that "As the academic side of the team involved in this project, we are of an age where the experience of going to Art School was very different from that of a University. Art Schools had a core business of reading and drawing. Art Schools were very physical experiences. They all had workshops; ceramics, sculpture, glass, photography... and print rooms. These were full of processes such as etching, stone based lithography, screen-printing, and of course, letterpress" (Tullet & Wood, 2012). Unlike Camberwell, Lincoln College of Art has operated from many buildings within the city and the original letterpress workshop no longer remains. The workshop is a collection of type and equipment that has been gathered by Graphic Design Lecturers Barrie Tullet and Philippa Wood, and is situated in the studio for student use. This isochronal approach has in turn informed the visual language of the work, as "even though we have to work more in the spirit of Werkman than Warde, we have begun to know the nuances of our press and find work-arounds for the lack of chases, leading, furniture, composing stones and all the things we took for granted when we were students." (2012).



**FIGURE 3** Barrie Tullett and Philippa Wood, Senior Lecturers, BA (Hons) Graphic Design, Lincoln School of Art. The letterpress workshop at Lincoln has been reinstated by Tullett and Wood, having previously been lost through a series of college relocations. The press is currently occupied within the Graphic Design studio within the old Co-operative Department Store. The piece combines an eclectic mix of wood and metal typefaces, listing the departments within the larger store and how they are currently used.

## THE APPRENTICE TRADITION

This impact of history upon current practice is clearly embedded within each set of prints, and constitutes a common thread that runs through the accompanying essays. The legacy of the retiring compositors clearly still resonates as many are mentioned by name. This poses new challenges, as Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon from Central Saint Martins question, “It will be interesting to see what changes a new influx of technicians with very different backgrounds will bring to both practice and teaching and learning, especially in relation to the craft of printing”(2012).



**FIGURE 4** Catherine Dixon, Senior Lecturer, Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design. Dixon's piece supports a double meaning through typographic alignment and visually reinforced through weight. It marks the end of an era in recording the retirement of technicians Malcolm Parker and Nick Nineham. It combines an explanation of the value of letterpress printing in design and the sadness of the intrinsic loss of knowledge with their departure.

The importance of oral history is made clear through the stories of one of the last formally trained compositors such as John Himbury, a compositor who formerly taught letterpress before transferring to the computer suite. Emily Higgins, a postgraduate student at the college who conducted an interview for the related essay, notes “As a computer technician, his is a rather refreshing story; one that

embraces technological change and proves that there really is a place for traditional skill in the ever-changing contemporary design industry.” John speaks of his training as a compositor, attending college as an apprentice, and the division of his day into different departments whereby “we did ‘design’ in the evenings”. (2012). This echoes the experiences of Anthony Froshaug, typographer and educator, who taught at many London colleges and was denied access to the Central School (now Central Saint Martins) workshop both as a student and tutor, not having undertaken any formal training. Educational institutions reflected the division in industry, whereby design was a separate discipline from print production and each were taught as discrete courses. Such was the formal demarcation between the areas of design and production that “any engagement for the student of design with typography was always at a remove.” (Baines and Dixon, 2012). The division between print and design was replicated at Brighton where there was a clear geographic divide between vocational typographic training for the print trade on one side of the building, and the education of designers on the other. The distance was defined not merely by academic and philosophic approach, training or education, but reinforced by the physical space between workshop and studio.

## THE EDUCATION OF THE DESIGNER

The technical teaching of letterpress composition was phased out at all participating colleges by the early 1980's. It is in these educational workshop spaces that the project is rooted, as opposed to commercial printers. It is important to draw a distinction between the two, as the primary purpose of the workshops differ fundamentally. This project aims to foster an environment of learning. Until the advent of the Mac, commercial letterpress workshops functioned as a means to produce artifacts. There is evidence that in addition to serving as a training environment, the letterpress workshops within institutions were used to produce in-house print jobs for the college, creating printed ephemera such as tickets, certificates, magazines, catalogues and promotional material.

: *If the letterpress workshops are no longer relevant*  
: *in the training of apprentices or used for production,*  
: *is it pertinent to ask, What is their primary function?*

This is the principal question the 6x6 Project attempts to investigate. There are many reasons for preserving the workshops within each school, but in each case it has been an active choice to keep letterpress equipment, despite the movement and reconfiguration of premises. At the tipping point when colleges were forced to consider

new buildings and justify resources in relation to emerging digital practice, a clear educational rationale was required to underpin the letterpress workshops. This was largely based upon the perceived quality of student's typographic understanding realised through the handling of metal type. (Figure 5, *London College of Communication*). The educational rationale was reinforced by a commitment to honour the continued employment of existing staff trained in the apprenticeship tradition, despite the advent of new technology. In colleges where powerful print union chapters existed, a resolute defence of the compositor's employment rights ensured the preservation of the press. Many provincial colleges who placed an emphasis on vocational graphic design training strived to keep abreast of changing technology by disposing of type and presses in the belief that they were out of date. More established institutions, perhaps with a rounder perception of the broader discipline, understood and cherished these learning spaces that reinforced typographic understanding and supported student experimentation through print. All the workshops retained a direct historical link with the origins of typographic history.

		Workshop Department room				Hand Composition Elephant and Castle			
Centaur	roman	W113				14	18	30	36
Century	roman/italic	E9	6	8	10	12	14		
Century Schoolbook	roman/italic	E6					18	24	30 36 48
	bold					14	18	24	30 36 48 60
Columna		W113						24	36 48
Elongated Roman		W113						30 36	48 60
Falstaff	roman	E6				14	18	24	30 36 48
	italic					12	14	18	24 30 36 48
Impact		E6				12	14	18	24 30 36 48
Ionic	roman	E6	5	6	7	8	9		
	italic					6	8	9	
Legend		W113						24	30 36 48
Marina	script	E6				12	14	18	24
Mistral		W113							30 36 48
Romulus	roman/italic	W110			8	9	10		
	bold/ital caps					8	9	10	
Sam Serif	shaded	E6					14		30 36
Thorne Shaded		W113						24	36 48
Times	roman	W110	6	8	9	10	11	12	14 18 24 30 36 42 48
	italic		6	8	9	10	11	12	14 18 24 30
	small caps		6	8	9	10	11	12	
	bold		6	8	9	10	11	12	14 18 24 30 36 42 48
	bold italic							14	18 24 30 36
	heavy filling							14	18 24 30 36
Typewriter		W110/4				10	12		
Youthline Script		W113				12	14	18	24 30 36 48

Typesets no longer available at the London College of Communication (formerly London College of Printing). Source: Staibury, C. & Rex, P. (1981) Typesets held at the Workshop and Graphic Design Departments, London: London College of Printing.

**FIGURE 5** *Christian Granados, Letterpress Technician, London College of Communication.* Granados' approach relies on historical research, in the form of an existing type catalogue which previous technicians produced in 1981. Through a careful audit of the present type, he is able to compare the collections and record what is missing. By replicating the format of the original catalogue and using an axis of font and type size he has visualized the missing cases. The table also reveals the extent of the previous collection which was housed in five different rooms and has now been consolidated into a single space. The physicality of storing letterpress type forces value judgments to be made in relation to the importance of specific cases when space is at a premium.

Today, the workshops are used predominantly by Graphic Design and Illustration students. The mode of teaching delivery varies from institution to institution, but the majority of colleges have an induction process to the workshop area that is delivered by technical staff. This enables students to work independently with access to specialist support. There are no discrete undergraduate letterpress courses in the UK. Students in the participating colleges are encouraged to explore design briefs through a range of media which may include: interaction, film, publication, print and print processes including letterpress. The adoption of letterpress as a medium by students is therefore primarily through self-selection.

## THE WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

Many of the essays recognize the need for the spaces to serve as an engine for critical dialogue rather than as a mausoleum of typographic history. Steve Rigley at Glasgow School of Art acknowledges the enlightened thinking in relation to workshop spaces. The School is currently undergoing redevelopment, which will see the letterpress workshop moved to a more prominent place within the building, with transparent walls throwing light on the black art of printing. Ridley notes, “whilst being an absolute necessity, rows of Macs can feel sterile in their uniformity. Studios and workshops may act as a counter to this impersonal environment providing a more concrete or located sense of identity, a strong driver in the competitive world of student recruitment.” (Rigley, 2012).



**FIGURE 6** Steve Rigley, Senior Lecturer, BA (Hons) Visual Communication, Glasgow School of Art. The piece reflects the change of location of the 'Caseroom' within Glasgow School of Art, which at the time of writing is currently housed in temporary accommodation, 'Skypark', on an industrial estate near the Clyde before its return to a new building on its previous site on Renfrew Street opposite the Macintosh building. The keys reflect the movement of the Caseroom and provide an example of found material raised to type height.

The importance of sustaining the relevance of letterpress workshops is a common thread, as Baines and Dixon argue ...

: *“Our situation today is quite different from that when letterpress was so commercially significant. In a college situation letterpress is not a museum, it is a workshop, but we need to be clear about what it is actually good for.” (2012).*

Most of the participating students had undertaken a basic letterpress introduction, but the design and production of a run of 200 prints was a new experience that served to inform their typographic practice. They were reacquainted with handling type as a physical object. The physical dimensions of the type in hand confronted students born after 1971 (the introduction of decimalisation in the UK) with an imperial-based system of measurement with which they were less familiar. The point system based on unit divisions in twelfths as opposed to tenths related directly to the project title 6x6 and the division of the page format specified in the brief.

In some cases, this created a disconnect between the digital layouts that some students had prepared for composition based on centimetres and the reality of setting type in a workshop underpinned by points and picas. This prompted reflections upon measure, alignment (particularly justification), type sizes, and inter-word spacing. As Barney Stepney, participating student, commented, “Planning is essential. It is important to understand the order of design in relation to print and registration.”

The elements of the typographic palette affect the nature of a line of type. For example, students faced with justification were forced to make active decisions, visually crafting spacing rather than achieving it through a single keystroke. The knock-on effect of considerations of line length and leading forced students to consider column depth, and text extent and reintroduced ideas masked by digital technology, such as casting off and estimating the number of characters available in a case. Brighton student Sebastian Brown, reflecting on the experience commented, “I found I had a far better understanding of spacing and justification of type” but continued pragmatically, “...more maths is involved.”

: *This project experience exposed ideas that are intrinsic to letterpress practice and directly relate to Gutenberg’s modular invention of type, yet are obscured by digital composition.*

Letterpress remains the only media in which they are made visible during the process of composition and the creation of a forme.

While some students tackled complex typographic spacing issues, others chose to re-appropriate material within the workshop to undertake a broader range of relief printing. They explored the possibilities of printing from the spacing material and found matter, including image blocks. Students who are familiar with a range of digital, print and film technologies find inventive ways to generate material and integrate it within a letterpress form; for example, using laser cutting as a means of creating new image or type blocks and making printing surfaces from digital files. The eclectic incorporation of new technologies within the letterpress process constitutes new territory. Many students approach the design process iteratively as opposed to the linear training of the apprentice, demonstrating how the workshop has opened up to become an experimental space which enhances design thinking and makes profound and new printed matter. These findings within the project reflect the broader appeal of the media and are perhaps indicative of a renewed interest and revival of letterpress nationally.

There is a greater freedom and experimentation in the manner students design and prepare material for print now that the refined conventions of letterpress composition no longer remain. This is at odds with the previous generation of compositors where men, like their machines, were trained to be a configuration of interchangeable parts. Whilst recognising the new design freedoms within letterpress practice for the sake of a publication, it was necessary to conform to a template. This was one of the constraints that all participants had to work within to ensure the publication was produced from multiple presses with common margins. The printing process was organised differently at each college; in some workshops the students were entirely responsible for printing their own work and physically making every print, whilst at other colleges the technician took responsibility for the print run.

## THE DESIGNER AS AUTHOR

The project brief asked staff and students to design and produce an edition of 200 copies of each page. This placed many students in the unusual position of taking responsibility for both the design and production of an artifact. This appealed to Georgia from Brighton who commented, "The speed of the process is annoying but a large print run is achievable for a nominal cost." The designer who produces and publishes a short run, limited edition, or print pages for a collaborative production in response to an open-ended brief, takes on the role of author and maker. This is a freedom rarely afforded to staff



and students who respond to a commercial or educational brief through print. As educators, we often ask students to respond to a brief with a visual outcome that represents print: a rough, a dummy, a client presentation, but is not actually a finished artifact.

Through letterpress all the participants produced a print rather than the representation of a design. When considering the nature of authorship and production, student Barney Stepney made the observation, "In letterpress, planning is essential. It is important to the order of design in relation to print and registration ..." and continued, "... it made us more conscious designers. You have to make choices rather than working with defaults on the computer". The reality of making the artifact, not a representation of the artifact, was noted by Georgia Davies, "It is harder to decide upon colour, but instantly visible on the page". Production is time-consuming and needs to be factored into the overall process. It is interesting that many students versed in digital design commented on the physical engagement of standing to compose and operating the press. This was described by Davies as, "... the joy in the process of physically making".

: *All the students took pleasure from the notion that*  
: *letterpress authorship is a holistic activity and constitutes*  
: *an educational model that integrates design craft*  
: *and production.*

This is well summarized by Baines and Dixon, when the experience of students, "for whom the Mac today represents their social-network, their television, their games room, their office and more, to step outside of that all-encompassing digital world is to really play? Certainly ideas of digital 'escape' are repeatedly found in rationales for working with letterpress with students, with the language of description frequently touching on the therapeutic, even spiritual. However, beyond any art-house fascinations with the process of print-making and letterpress as aesthetic – 'the quirky spacing and chipped type factor' – there is a simple pleasure to be found in having such immediate access to a means to producing multiple works, that is to say, to publish." (Baines and Dixon, 2012).

It is fashionable to discuss the physicality of letterpress — the touch, feel and smell, the weight of the type and the value of the printed artifact. There is a danger that all aficionados of print, including many of the 6x6 participants, may fall victim to this vice. Staff from Glasgow, aware of the temptation, questioned, "Will letterpress merely continue to function as a sign for the authentic with the physical processes of printing as a form of re-enactment? Or will these processes be further investigated in order to articulate forms of embodied knowledge neglected within digital practice?" (Rigley, 2012).

## THE VIEW AHEAD

The 6x6: Collaborative Letterpress Project has provided the opportunity for staff and students to reflect upon the nature of letterpress within their own institutions, and consider its role in the future. The involvement of students as joint researchers has been inspirational, with many driving forward with new ideas and ways of executing work. The participating staff teams collectively share the thoughts voiced at Central Saint Martins, "We as tutors have spoken of our vision for how letterpress enhances current design curricula; to teach is to be open to learn. It will be interesting to learn from the students themselves, how they envision the possibilities of the composing room beyond our perspectives, beyond teaching, beyond even print." (Baines and Dixon, 2012). These 'possibilities' have been explored and demonstrated in the work produced, with students stretching the capabilities of the process through integrating digital technologies. The workshop is an environment which fosters immersive learning and enables staff and students to work together on an equal footing.

## THE END MATTER

Reflecting on our initial objectives of the project, we have realized all of them, but perhaps not as we had anticipated: finding Letterpress workshops, inviting colleges to select participating students and staff to work on a common brief and supporting essay that reflect on issues raised within their research and practice, set production parameters and deadlines, make use of immersive research methodology and collaborative approaches, and finally to collect, edit, collate, design and disseminate a collaborative research publication through exhibition and conference.

In relation to the broader aims, there remains work to be done. We would like to establish links with all colleges with letterpress facilities in the UK and are seeking to establish relationships with educational institutions internationally. This process of extending the network will produce a comprehensive overview of letterpress within design education. The sample project has stimulated practice, research and critical enquiry, which has generated debate within the broader discipline of typography. We have begun to document and record the range of equipment and typefaces within the workshops but recognize that this is a significant undertaking that requires many further visits, and constitutes a significant body of additional research. This work would complement our intention to develop a more extensive history of letterpress within UK trade, art and design schools. Due to the nature of the process and suitability of the presses for mass production within the art schools, the current publication is a limited edition. However, it is planned that some of the findings may be disseminated through conferences and digital platforms.

Letterpress today repositions the design student physically in a workshop space, and intellectually within a new design paradigm that could not have been occupied by the apprentice. As the paradigm evolves, the educational challenge will be to ensure that the legacy of traditional skills traditionally associated with letterpress do not fall away as the technical knowledge diminishes. "As those who teach in art schools, we are stewards of a discipline and not merely employees of our colleges and universities. We have a duty to that legacy in making informed decisions for those who follow." (Gridneff and Haslam, 2012).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Alexander Cooper* graduated from London College of Printing in 2003 with a BA (Hons) in Typo/Graphic Design. He has run the letterpress workshop at what is now London College of Communication for the past ten years, teaching students from across the School of Design and external groups including University of Delaware, North Carolina State University, Eastern Michigan University, Art Center College, RMIT and Kingston University. His practice-based research focuses on the interaction between content and process, through pushing the boundaries of letterpress whilst respecting its traditions. He has worked, exhibited and spoken about his work internationally, including AIGA (USA), College Arts Association (USA), Plantin Moretus Museum (Antwerp) and Archivio di Sacchi (Milan). Recent projects include the 6x6: Collaborative Letterpress Project, a student and staff participatory letterpress publication involving six colleges with active letterpress workshops.

*Rose Gridneff* graduated from London College of Communication in 2005 with a BA (Honours) in Book Arts. She runs the second year of the BA Graphic Design at the University of Brighton. Rose completed her MA in Design Writing & Criticism in 2010, focusing on alternative propositions for design education. She is particularly interested in the role of letterpress and craft within education, and is currently working on a collaborative project that brings together six universities with letterpress workshops to share practice and research. Gridneff and Cooper have worked collaboratively under the name of Workshop since 2009. Creating primarily self-initiated work, they have exhibited in the UK, USA, Denmark and Holland and lecture internationally. They work out of their workshop in London, which they regularly open to students and professionals from around the world.

*Andrew Haslam* graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1987. Since then he has run his own studio in London creating science, history and geography books for children. He has published 28 children's books. Recognition for his work includes the American Institute of Physics Award for Science writing, the Geographic Association Gold medal for most significant contribution to geography and the American Readers' Digest Creative Children's Media Award for best series. For 12 years he has combined his studio work with teaching graphic design and typography, first at the University of Brighton and then at Central Saint Martins. He was Head of Typography at the London College of Printing before becoming Course Director of MA Communication Design at Central Saint Martins, Head of Visual Communication at the University of Brighton Faculty of Arts, and now Course Director of Graphic Design and Associate Head of School at University Kingston London.

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## **AUTHOR CONTACT**

*Alexander Cooper*

Lecturer

London College of Communication

Elephant & Castle

London

SE1 6SB

[a.j.cooper@lcc.arts.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.cooper@lcc.arts.ac.uk)

*Rose Gridneff*

Senior Lecturer, BA (Hons) Graphic Design

University of Brighton

Grand Parade

Brighton

BN2 0JY

[r.gridneff@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:r.gridneff@brighton.ac.uk)

*Andrew Haslam*

Associate Head of Design School

Kingston University London

Knights Park

Kingston upon Thames

KT1 2QJ

UK

[A.Haslam@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:A.Haslam@kingston.ac.uk)

## NEW VISIBLE LANGUAGE ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

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This year Visible Language has transitioned from editor Sharon Poggenpohl to Mike Zender and settled into its new home at the University of Cincinnati. With that transition has come a renewed focus on visual communication research and with that the addition of several new Advisory Board members. Short biographical sketches for three of our new board members follow here. More will follow as space permits.



### MARY C DYSON

Mary C Dyson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading, UK. She studied experimental psychology leading to a PhD in perception, before switching discipline to teach theoretical and empirical approaches to typography and graphic communication. The focus of her teaching and research has been how users interact with documents, and at a more specific level, how typefaces are processed when reading and when designing. She has done experiments with screen-based material and published work on reading and interacting on screen alongside reviews of other research in this area. She has also supervised many research students on topics relating to her own research, but also more broadly within the field. This experience has developed her teaching of research methods.

Her research interests are driven by a desire to bridge the gap between scientists and designers and find commonalities. She is therefore committed to interdisciplinary research and enjoys collaborating with colleagues from various disciplines to explore areas of common ground.

Recent work has drawn on her PhD in perception and has looked at the perception of typefaces by typography students, in comparison to non-designers. These studies draw on examples of research into other areas of perception, both visual and auditory, i.e. the perception of faces, music, and speech, which suggest avenues to explore in relation to how we perceive visual forms. In particular, this approach stimulates ideas concerning particular methods of investigation and seeks to develop novel experiments within the field of typography.

## JORGE FRASCARA

Jorge Frascara is Professor Emeritus (University of Alberta), Fellow of the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada and of the Society for the Science of Design of Japan, Advisor to the Doctoral Program at the University IUAV of Venice, and Adjunct Professor at the Universidad de las Americas Puebla. He was an advisor to the ISO and to the Canadian Standards Council on graphic symbols. He has been President of Icograda and Chairman of the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta.

He is the author of *Communication Design* (2005); and *User-Centred Graphic Design* (1997); and the editor of *Designing Effective Communications* (2006); *Design and the Social Sciences* (2002); *Graphic Design, World Views* (1990); and the ISO Technical Report 7239, *Design and Application of Public Information Symbols* (1984). He has also published four books in Spanish and more than 50 articles internationally. He is an advisor for four design journals, and has received honors and awards from a wide range of organizations.

Frascara has lived and worked in Argentina, Canada, Guatemala, England, Italy, and Mexico, has been a guest lecturer in 26 countries, and during his 31 years in Canada he was a consultant for different departments of the Federal Government, the Province of Alberta, Telus Canada, the Mission Possible Coalition (traffic safety), the Alberta Drug Utilization Program, and other organizations. In Italy he worked for the Health Services, and for traffic safety. He now lives in Cholula, Mexico, and runs an information design and social communications consultancy with his wife Guillermina Noël.



## KEN FRIEDMAN

Ken Friedman is University Distinguished Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Design at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. He works at the intersection of three fields: design, management, and art. Friedman works with theory construction and research methodology for design. He also works with design process and design thinking as tools for value creation and economic innovation. He is active in developing international research networks and conferences for the design research community.

Friedman is an editor of the journals *Artifact* and the *Journal of Design Research*, and a member of the editorial board of such journals as *Design Studies*, *Design and Culture*, the *International Journal of Design*, and *Visible Language*.

Ken is also a practicing artist and designer active in the international laboratory known as Fluxus. He had his first solo exhibition in New York in 1966. His work is represented in major museums and galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, and Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart.



## ➤ STAN RUECKER

Dr. Stan Ruecker is an Associate Professor with current research interests in the areas of humanities visualization, the future of reading, and information design. He came to ID from the University of Alberta's interdisciplinary Humanities Computing program where he was also an Associate Professor, supervising graduate students and leading seminars on experimental interface design, knowledge management and analysis, research methods, and interdisciplinary research project management. His students have gone on to work with major research and development projects in fields ranging from medical imaging to oilfield decision support.

He is a major grant holder, and his research teams have presented their findings at over a hundred international conferences in design, computing science, educational technology, literature, communication technology, library and information studies, and humanities computing. He was the principal investigator of the SSHRC SRG Humanities Visualization team, and currently leads the interface design unit of the SSHRC MCRI Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) project.

His work to date has focused on developing prototypes to support the hermeneutic or interpretive process, and he has published extensively on information design, experimental interface design, and interdisciplinary research project management. His book *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage*, co-authored by Milena Radzikowska and Stéfan Sinclair, was released in 2011 by Ashgate Press.

He holds an interdisciplinary PhD in Humanities Computing from University of Alberta, an MDes from the same, an MA in English literature from University of Toronto, and advanced undergraduate degrees in English literature and computer science from University of Regina. He is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Alberta's School of Library and Information Studies, Department of English and Film Studies, and Humanities Computing Program, and in the University of Victoria's Faculty of Humanities.

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Editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

: Mike Zender  
: Editor, *Visible Language*  
: College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning  
: School of Design  
: University of Cincinnati  
: PO Box 210016  
: Cincinnati, OH 45221-0016  
: [mike.zender@uc.edu](mailto:mike.zender@uc.edu)

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: 513.556.4377  
: [sheri.cottingim@uc.edu](mailto:sheri.cottingim@uc.edu)